

Joe Bustillos

November 15, 1990

Change of Pace Editorial: Splitting 714 is just another part of the change

AT&T, MCI, Sprint, Pacific Bell, and GTE: it's all telecommunications alphabet soup. Whenever the phone company proposes a change, the public runs for cover.

Earlier this week GTE and Pacific Bell issued a proposal to split the region served by the 714 area code (Orange, Riverside and San Bernardino Counties) into two area codes.

Over-reacting to the proposal, LA Times staff writer Sonni Efron lamented about poor Orange Countians having to change their business cards and stationery.

"Almost as bad as the prospect of moving, it's the threat that Ma Bell's evil offspring may yank away your familiar 714 area code and reclassify you---and half the people in your rolodex---as 909," Efron moaned.

Of course the change won't take place for another three years.

Perhaps what Efron and the public doesn't realize is that it is the nature of the telecommunications business to change. Splitting area codes is only the latest development in a history of continuous change.

Pacific Bell, formerly Pacific Telephone, the alleged evil offspring of AT&T, shares with AT&T a history that reaches back to the days when radio and television networks were dependent on the Bell System to reach correspondents and audiences beyond the

ring of local mountains and hills. It's unseen switchmen share an oral history that the mountains and hills would be envious of.

Heavy copper cabling has been replaced by hairlike fiber optics. Switching equipment that twenty years ago filled five floors of a large downtown phone installation now sits in a space the size of most living rooms. Thunderous electro-mechanical contacts have been replaced by silent electronics. The phone company is the birth place of the transistor and digital electronics. In this maelstrom of change no one can mark the passage of time like the switchmen who have manned the machines over the decades.

Forget about the touted dilemmas of splitting area codes for a moment, Pacific Bell harkens from a time of Wild Wild West personalities suffering under the management of AT&T executives from "back East."

A switchman in the not-so-ancient community of Irvine recently recalled the story about the weekly poker game in one of the Los Angeles offices where the players packed six-shooters. After midnight, when the evening crew had gone home, a small group of evening and day workers conducted their business in a friendly uneventful manner. One night, however, one of the players decided during a lull in the game to take a shot at an empty beer can. The player hit the can squarely but failed to remember about the working phone equipment directly behind his target.

The old electro-mechanical switching equipment could handle a lot of mistreatment but it wasn't impervious to gunshot. The

wounded piece of equipment, in the words of the switchmen, "fell on its ass." The terrified switchmen worked feverishly through the remainder of the night replacing the bent and blasted switches with equipment from an unused section of the machine before the bosses showed up in the morning. The incident went unnoticed by management. In today's digital reality that replacement could not have taken place.

Another veteran in Irvine told the story about working in the multi-storied Compton office during the Watts riots. Phone company installations being well-fortified and mostly windowless in those days, the predominantly white workers were not in any immediate danger. But the curious, being trapped in the building for the duration of the violence, were cautioned against going to the roof of the building. The building was said to have been surrounded by police sharp shooters. The company said that it didn't want any of its workers mistaken for alleged snipers.

Another Orange County veteran recalled when the women were segregated to operator positions and the men to the switching rooms in the office in downtown Anaheim. Somehow they managed to get together, he said, with results that never managed to make it into the company newsletter.

Splitting area codes and ruined stationery, bah humbug. The useless business cards and 714 area code will all become just another part of the growing catalog of memories. But one suspects it probably pales in comparison to the one time when company evening mail couriers were driving their company vans off the end of a not-yet completed freeway for fun . . .

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AT&T, MCI, Sprint, Pacific Bell, and GTE; it's all telecommunications alphabet soup. Whenever the phone company proposes a change, the public runs for cover.

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Over-reacting to the proposal, LA Times staff writer Sonni Efron lamented about poor Orange Countians having to change their business cards and stationery.

"Almost as bad as the prospect of moving, it's the threat that Ma Bell's evil offspring may yank away your familiar 714 area code and reclassify you---and half the people in your Rolodex---as 909," Efron moaned.

Of course the change won't take place for another three years. Hell, the way Orange Countians tend to move about most of them probably won't live here when the change takes place.

Perhaps what the public doesn't realize is that it is the nature of the telecommunications business to change. Spokesmen for Pacific Bell and GTE said that they are simply running out of telephone numbers.

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Phone Companies to Split the 714 Area Code in Two

By ERIC LICHTBLAU
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Faced with a dwindling supply of phone numbers because of the region's rapid growth, GTE and Pacific Bell officials have decided to carve a new area code out of the existing 714 zone now used by much of Orange County and the Inland Empire, officials said Monday.

But don't throw away your business cards and stationery just yet.

Phone company officials, who will announce plans for splitting up the area code today, say they still aren't sure just who will lose 714—and who will retain it. The only thing that seems certain is that some of the 2 to 4 million customers who now have it will eventually have to give it up.

The phone companies will be offering three proposed areas for a

new area code and—as required by a new state law—will then allow their 714 customers to have a say in the final decision.

The new area code won't take effect until January, 1993.

But the shortage of details on the new plan and its far-off deadline didn't prevent some grumblings Monday.

Orange County Chamber of Commerce President Lucien D. Truehill predicted that there was "going to be a lot of resistance if they split this county up into different area codes. This is a dramatic change, and it's going to be a shock to the business community."

"It's going to require a lot of changes for business just as far as stationery and things like that. But more than that, there's the danger of the region losing its identity

Please see AREA CODE, A23

AREA CODE: 714 Must Give Way

Continued from A1

when you break up the area code like that," he said.

"Isn't there another way it could be done?" he asked.

Officials at Pacific Bell and GTE California reply, "No, there isn't."

The change was forced by "the explosion of customers" in the 714 region, said GTE California spokesman Larry Cox. That explosion is a reflection of both the population boom in Orange County and the Inland Empire and the growth of high technology items such as telefax machines, interconnected computers and cellular phones.

Orange County's population grew 21.3% from 1980 to 1990, reaching an estimated 2.3 million people. San Bernardino and Riverside counties grew a combined 59.1% over that same decade, to 2.5 million people. The 714 area code serves nearly all of Orange County, except for Seal Beach and parts of Los Alamitos and La Habra, along with the western portions of Riverside and San Bernardino counties and several eastern cities in Los Angeles County.

"We're just running out of phone numbers," Cox said.

GTE and Pacific Bell, the two principal phone carriers for this region, now provide service on about 4.7 million lines, amounting to an estimated 2 to 4 million individual customers, officials said. Leaving about a 25% buffer of numbers in reserve, the companies say they have about 5 to 6 million numerical combinations available to their customers. But within the next two years, company officials said, they are in danger of surpassing that threshold.

714 AREA CODE



Los Angeles Times

This will be the second change in the 714 area code's structure in a decade. Created in 1951, the 714 area code lost its San Diego area users in 1982 with the adoption of the 619 area code.

Once the phone companies put out their three proposed boundaries for possible new area code zones, public hearings are planned the week of Nov. 26 through 30. That new review process, being used for the first time in the state, was dictated by legislation sponsored by Assemblywoman Gwen Moore (D-Los Angeles) and signed into law in July.

Factors such as engineering and economics will also come into play in the final determination. "It's not totally up to the customers; they'll be helping us," said Pacific Bell spokeswoman Linda Bonniksen.

The state legislation, spurred by

complaints about the way that phone companies have created new area codes in the past, also prevents the companies from raising the cost of local calls that were once part of the same area code.

Even before the 714 area gets its promised realignment, callers will have to relearn some once-familiar area codes for friends and associates elsewhere around the state.

Customers on the Berkeley-Oakland side of San Francisco Bay will have to abandon their 415 code in favor of 510, starting in October, 1991. And parts of the present 213 area code—including Seal Beach and parts of Los Alamitos and La Habra in Orange County—will switch to 310 in early 1992.

The good news: the phone companies are offering three-month grace periods in each changed area, during which calls made with both the new and old digits will get through.

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MOLAVE: History of a Hidden River

...to ask, "I live in 909, where do you live?"

But what if your area code winds up being *outré*?
 "Whatever they do, I want to be the area code that Newport Beach is in, 'cause I tell people I'm from Newport Beach anyhow," said comedian Todd Glass, who secretly resides in Fountain Valley. "I don't want to end up with Riverside. That doesn't attract any women at bars."

If southern Orange County is reclassified as 909, it could force a whole new lingo for enclaves such as the Balboa Bay Club. In his novel "The Golden Orange," author Joseph Wambaugh detailed the sagging silicone and seamy side of life among Orange County's superrich, noting that fortune-hungry women at the Bay Club classified potential husbands as "714 rich," meaning simply wealthy, as opposed to "FFH rich," meaning rich enough to make the Fortune 500.

"My suggestion would be for the Golden Orange to lobby for 967, not

909," said Wambaugh, who sourced on Newport Beach and has now become a 619.

"[Number] 967 is the California penal code section for conspiracy to defraud, and that would be a much more appropriate number for

'I don't want to end up with Riverside. That doesn't attract any women at bars.'

TODD GLASS
Comedian

the Golden Orange," Wambaugh said.

But Will Tate, who sells cellular telephones at Electronic Dreams in San Clemente, sees a potential windfall. If the area codes do change, cellular phone owners will have to bring their telephones in to be reprogrammed. Most stores charge between \$25 and \$50 to do that, Tate said.

"I don't think anybody really cares for now, but when it happens, we'll get a deluge of people..." Tate said. "It will drag people to our store, and I'm looking forward to that."

Without exception, Orange County residents interviewed Tuesday said they would prefer to keep the county united in a single area code: 714. But with a sagging economy, a weak real estate market and the threat of war in the Persian Gulf, few seemed prepared to battle the telephone company for control of their electronic destiny.

"Nine-o-nine has a nice ring to it," said Martin Bensen, artistic director of the South Coast Repertory Theater. "It's hard to get all worked up over the issue. But now I'll have to cram another number into this number-sodden brain."

"I'm still one of those people who remembers the days when it was 'Tuxedo 1234' to call a cab," Bensen said.

Times correspondent John Nalick also contributed to this report.

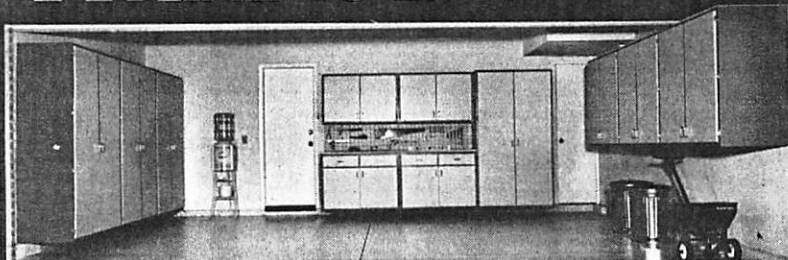
Even in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, community leaders said the value of keeping the switch simple outweighs the inconvenience caused them.

"I'm all in favor of breaking it down by county boundaries," said Bob Kercheval, president of the East Valley Coalition of Chambers of Commerce, which serves San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

"The plan makes total sense, and I'd like to make the Inland Empire an area code unto itself—there's a value in that identification," Kercheval said. On the plan to make southern Orange County a part of 909 as well, he added: "I would rather that didn't happen. It's a far better deal for all of us here not to be associated with Orange County in a numerical sense."

Under the popular county-division plan, Big Bear, Big Bear Lake and Running Springs—now part of 714 and served by Continental Telephone Co., rather than Pacific Bell or GTE—would be included in the 909 region.

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County Residents Hung Up on Area Code

Reaction: While many cringe at the thought of reclassification, others find the prospects attractive.

By SONNI EFRON
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Call it Area Code Anxiety.

Almost as bad as the prospect of moving, it's the threat that Ma Bell's evil offspring may yank away your old familiar 714 area code and reclassify you—as a 909. Unpleasant anticipation washed over Orange County on Tuesday, with many residents praying that "they" would do it to Riverside and San Bernardino counties instead.

"You're kidding! You're kidding! Oh, my gosh! How're they going to divide it up?" said Linda Lund, manager of the Ultimate Invitation, a posh stationery store at Fashion Island in Newport Beach. "I can see people who've just gotten their stationery printed won't be so happy about this."

Indeed. Just two days ago, Newport Beach mystery writer Macdonald Harris placed an order for \$250 worth of stationery printed with his 714 telephone exchange.

"I ordered 1,000 large letterhead and 1,000 small letterhead and envelopes to match..." Harris moaned. "You can figure out how many letters I have to write every day between now and 1993."

But others were thrilled by the possibility that a 909 area code for the high-rent district between Newport Beach and San Clemente could have instant snob appeal.

Lund speculated that clients who boast addresses in Corona del Mar and Newport Beach may soon be able to ask, "I live in 909, where do you live?"

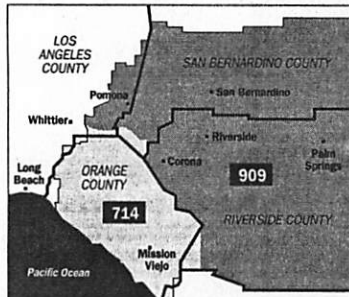
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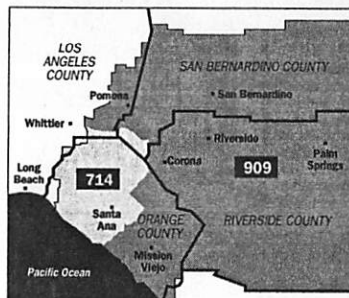
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AREA CODES: THE POSSIBILITIES

Projecting a shortage of seven-digit phone numbers in the region, phone companies Tuesday proposed three plans to restructure the 714 area code:



Under the plan favored by GTE California and Pacific Bell, all of Orange County now in the 714 area code would keep that number. Virtually all of the rest of the 714 region—in eastern Los Angeles County and western Riverside and San Bernardino counties—would get a new 909 code in January, 1993.



In a plan that would yield a more equitable distribution of the region's telephone lines, both for now and in the future, the northern half of Orange County would keep the 714 area code. Starting in Irvine, the southern end would become 909, along with the Inland Empire.



Under a third "overlay" plan, everyone who now has a 714 area code would keep it, while new customers would all get the 909 code—regardless of where they are. This approach has never been tried in the United States. It would also mean that everyone in the region, regardless of area code, would have to dial 10 digits to make calls within the region.

Los Angeles Times

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PHONES: 3 Ways to Carve Up 714 Zone

Continued from A1
code changes, a division by county lines would be relatively easy in the 714 area because Orange County is already naturally divided from its eastern neighbors in many areas by unpopulated wild lands, such as Cleveland National Forest, officials said.

Royalty said the 714 area code is simply running out of numbers, forcing the creation of the new zone. Fueled by the region's boom in population in general and in high-tech items such as cellular phones and fax machines in particular, customer lines in the 714 area have surged from 2.6 million lines less than five years ago to 4.7 million today.

Under a second plan put forth by the phone company, northern Orange County would keep the 714 code, while South County would join the Inland Empire in adopting 909. The main advantage of this plan, officials say, is that it would more equally divide the area's 4.7 million lines than would the first plan, thus increasing the life span of the new area code.

A third "overlay" plan would allow everyone who now has a 714 area code to keep it, while all new users—no matter where they live within the region—would get the 909 exchange. This would mean that all 714 and 909 users, mingled in the Orange County and Inland Empire region, would have to dial 10 numbers to make any outgoing calls.

"Whoa, that one sounds incredibly unwieldy," said Pat Crockett, president of the South Orange County Chamber of Commerce.

Crockett's response was typical. Among more than a dozen people sampled informally Tuesday in the 714 area—from secretaries and clerks to city council members and business leaders—the plan to divide the areas by county was the unanimous choice.

"I don't think any community wants to have itself split up any more than it has to be," said Irvine City Councilman Barry J. Hammond, whose city would be divided at its southeast corner if the county is split. "We're already split by freeways, so we don't want to have an area code divide us even further."

Even in Riverside and San Bernardino counties, community leaders said the value of keeping the switch simple outweighs the inconvenience caused them.

"I'm all in favor of breaking it down by county boundaries," said Bob Kercheval, president of the East Valley Coalition of Chambers of Commerce, which serves San Bernardino and Riverside counties.

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Under the popular county-division plan, Big Bear, Big Bear Lake and Running Springs—now part of 714 and served by Continental Telephone Co., rather than Pacific Bell or GTE—would be included

But several unincorporated and largely unpopulated areas just outside Orange County will remain in 714: a small sliver of Los Angeles County south of Diamond Bar; in southwest San Bernardino Canyon

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BARRY J. HAMMOND
Irvine city councilman

in the Sleepy Hollow Canyon area; and in western Riverside County, on the southeast border of Orange County.

Those northeast Orange County cities now included in the 213 area

code—Seal Beach and parts of Los Alamitos and La Habra—would be unaffected by the switch. Under an earlier plan, they, along with other parts of Los Angeles, are to switch to 310 in 1992.

The plans have been under development for more than a year. A final decision will be made in January and the changes should be in effect in early 1993. Phone company officials say the area code changes—regardless of which plan is ultimately accepted—will not affect calling rates; that is determined by call distance, not area codes, they said.

Despite the phone companies' assurances of an easy transition, some frequent phone users were still clearly skeptical after Tuesday's announcement.

"I lived in L.A. when they switched [from 213 to 818] there, and it was a real pain," said Jenni Neff, a secretary at the Santa Margarita Co. "It's tough to get used to. And I'm sure they'll find a way to charge you more for the phone calls now too."

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Carving Up 714 Zone: Where Should Line Be?

■ **Telephones:** Companies suggest three ways to draw boundaries for old region and a new 909 area code.

By ERIC LICHTBLAU
TIMES STAFF WRITER

Newport Beach (714), a glitzy magazine for the rich and famous, won't have to worry about its masthead becoming irrelevant. And the high school kids on Orange County's 714 All-Star team don't have to send their jerseys back for new logos just yet.

They are among the lucky ones who get to keep their area code. But for millions of residents and businesses in the Inland Empire and the far-eastern end of Los Angeles County—and possibly even south Orange County—1993 will likely bring a new number to memorize: 909.

That's the new area code proposed Tuesday by officials at GTE California and Pacific Bell in a plan to answer a shrinking supply of seven-digit numbers in the booming 714 region.

Under a first-time review process mandated by a new state law, the phone companies will hold public hearings on the proposed changes Nov. 26-30 in Ontario, Brea, Riverside, San Bernardino, Irvine and Hemet.

The proposals are: leaving Orange County as 714 and turning the rest of the existing area code into 909; splitting Orange County into north and south and making South County part of the Inland Empire's new 909 setup; or interspersing

new 909 numbers with the existing 714s throughout the entire region.

Under the last scenario, new telephone lines in the existing 714 area would be given 909 area codes, meaning that neighbors could have different area codes and could only dial each other using 10-digit numbers.

The plan that received the strong backing of the phone companies Tuesday would essentially break down the area codes by county lines: Orange County, with the exception of three northwest cities now in 213, would keep 714, while virtually all the rest of the

■ AREA CODE ANXIETY

Residents wonder which is best—714 or 909? A22

present 714 area—from Diamond Bar and several other eastern Los Angeles cities, through western Riverside and San Bernardino—would switch to the 909 code as of January, 1993.

"This is the plan that will cause the least disruption for the public," asserted Reed Royalty, area vice president for Pacific Bell. Although expecting resistance to the changes from some quarters, he said, "We think we're easing the public into this as gently as we possibly can."

Unlike problems that arose in creating the new 310 area code in Los Angeles and in other area-

Please see **PHONES**, A22

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Shadow of Racism